

be convinced of its justice. The legislation promised for the benefit of evicted tenants may possibly do something towards placating the Irish members. If he be prepared to grant all they ask, the new Premier may command the vote of both sections of the Irish party; but it remains to be seen whether he is prepared to do so.

The Russo-German commercial treaty is likely to be ratified; the bill for that purpose has already received a second reading, at Berlin, by a good majority. Russia has already ratified the treaty. A curious story comes from St. Petersburg, of the reason why Russia consented to make the treaty; it is to the effect that it was necessary to throw a cooling stream on the excessive ardour of France. Lord Dufferin tells the world that the Czar may be relied on as the keeper of the peace of Europe. However this may be, Russia does not object to make a commercial treaty with Germany, a nation which is the peculiar object of French hatred and pent-up revenge. But the treaty has not necessarily any political meaning; or, if it has any, it might even be intended as a lull to suspicion. Meanwhile, the treaty nations may possibly derive some benefit from the agreement, which, like all other treaties war between the contracting parties would bring to an end. To some other countries it is likely to prove more or less injurious.

#### PRODUCTIVENESS OF MUNICIPAL FRANCHISES.

Toronto is being besieged by a company to grant it the right of supplying water to the citizens, in opposition to the city water works; and the extraordinary thing is that the offer is for a moment listened to. The city is now supplying itself with water from the best possible source of supply, though the means of getting it absolutely free from the possibility of contamination have not yet been perfected, by means of a tunnel under the bay, into which no sewage can enter. The company offers to do a variety of things, some of them hopelessly out of its reach, and for the privilege of the charter it professes a willingness to pay something.

The occasion is one which calls for a consideration of the relative advantages of municipal and company supply of certain things which are required in all cities.

Less than three quarters of a century ago a price was put upon many franchises by the legislative authority. This practice covered a wider area in the United States than in Canada. There bank and other charters were granted for a consideration; here all the early railway charters contained a provision that all over ten per cent. of the profits of the companies chartered were to go into the public treasury. Not a cent ever went into the coffers of Upper or Lower Canada from the overflow of railway revenue. Now all idea of obtaining a proportion of the earnings of chartered companies has been abandoned by the Governments, provincial or federal. But there are some franchises which municipalities do not willingly part with without stipulating for a portion of the earnings.

Tramways, gas, water, are among the things which attempts have been made to utilize in a way to increase municipal revenue. There is, perhaps, no case in Canada in which gas has been made to yield an actual income to the municipality. The obligation to pay, if it has ever existed, has been in such a contingent form that means of defeating it have not been difficult to find. Street railways have become sources of municipal revenue. Water and gas are, in future, both likely to be made productive of municipal revenue, whether the works are owned by the municipality or not.

The question for the municipalities is, whether it is best that the supply of water and gas should be furnished by themselves directly, or by companies organized for that purpose. Before experience came in to decide, the presumption was against the economy of the municipal supply; but since experience has become available as a basis of decision, this judgment has been reversed. A city can supply its own water or gas cheaper than it can buy it from a company. It is presumed to have a monopoly in its favor; and when this happens monopoly loses its objectionable character and ministers to the common good. There is no reason why gas and water, when supplied by the city for its own use, should not be a source of revenue; and this being admitted, there can be no possible advantage in giving a company power to do what can be done better by the city. If a company pays for the privilege of supplying gas or water, it first takes the means of paying from the citizens, with a surcharge for its own profits, which would otherwise go into the common treasury. A city corporation de-ludes itself if it supposes that it is getting something from the company which the citizens do not pay. The real question is in which way the desired revenue shall be obtained, directly or indirectly. The direct method has many advantages over the indirect, the chief of which is that there is nothing paid in the shape of profit to a third party, for employing which there is no necessity. The city has its own municipal organization for effecting the work. This is not free from defects, but the great business of municipal reformers is to bring it as near as possible to perfection. This is to be attained by the employment of experts in all departments.

It is impossible to lay down any rule applicable to all cities and towns, in the items of gas and water supply; but generally it will be best that they should aim to supply themselves without the intervention of a company. When a company is given a franchise to supply water, or gas, or electric light, it should be for a limited term, and the agreement should provide for the option of transfer to the municipality, at a valuation, when the time has expired. If this were done, the financial condition of many cities and towns would be greatly improved. Many of the existing companies, looked at from the public point of view, have rendered valuable services in the past. Some of them have done what it would have been inconvenient or impossible for the cities to do for themselves; but the time comes, in

nearly all cases, when their continued existence implies an unnecessary increase of the public burthens. A little foresight would have prevented this. At present it would be utterly inexcusable for the city of Toronto to create opposition to its own waterworks, the perfection of which is the pressing want of the times. This, the engineer advises, is to be done by means of a tunnel under the bay, and it is only a question of finance when this improvement should be undertaken.

#### MORE TIMBER.

Though hundreds of years have elapsed since Canada was discovered, there remained till last year vast stretches of country which civilized man had never explored. The exploratory survey of the Tyrrell brothers north-west of Hudson Bay has already been noticed in these columns. And now comes a singular expedition made by Mr. A. P. Low in the wilds of Labrador. To the east of Labrador, on the coast of Davis Strait, there long has been a fishery, partly confined to the navigable season and partly sedentary; on the western shore of this territory, the Hudson Bay Company has long had intercourse with the tribes which extend some distance inland. But, as a whole, little was known of the vast country which goes by the name of Labrador, until Mr. Low's exploration. He started north from Lake St. John, and now turns up at Hamilton Inlet, on the south-east coast of Labrador. Where he went is not clear from the meagre accounts published; but he started out on a river which runs in a direction nearly opposite, from his starting point, to his present location. He is said to have found that between his point of departure and Ungava Bay, in the north, that there are thousands of square miles of spruce trees, the majority of which would make 18-inch square timber. Labrador will therefore be valuable as a timber country. What minerals it holds, the Geological Survey Department must be left to tell, after it has followed Mr. Low. In the meantime, indications of vast deposits of rich iron ore are mentioned. Mr. Low will continue his explorations in the southern part of Labrador next season, and is expected to return to Ottawa next autumn.

#### FIRES ON THE FARM.

Since writing our previous article on the subject of fires on the farm, we have received the report for 1893, of Mr. Lachlin Leitch, who has been for some ten years inspector of the London Mutual Fire Insurance Company, and we find it very instructive. There is, in its pages, a whole sermon to farmers on the subject of needless loss by fire. Out of the 438 admitted claims (amounting to \$105,789) which that officer adjusted for the company during the year, no fewer than 201, aggregating \$26,817 loss, were caused by lightning; 103 were cases where animals were killed, and for these the loss was \$2,408, but the 98 losses on buildings and contents amounted to \$24,409. Then came the losses from unknown causes, 53 in number, absorbing \$24,861; and those from incendiarism, 19,